

R 201345Z MAR 91  
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5924  
INFO RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN  
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG  
AMCONSUL DURBAN  
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 04652

CAPE TOWN FOR ALSO EMBASSY

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR

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SUBJECT: THE ANC'S THABO MBEKI AND CHRIS HANI

REF: STATE 67418

11. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

12. WE APPRECIATE OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS IN REFTTEL. WE SHOULD SAY UP FRONT THAT WE DO NOT INTERACT MUCH WITH CHRIS HANI, WHO PREFERS TO LEAVE DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS TO OTHERS. NOR DO WE OFTEN SEE MBEKI AND HANI TOGETHER, EXCEPT FOR THE OCCASIONAL ASSEMBLAGE OF NEC MEMBERS ON SOME PUBLIC PLATFORM. WE HAVE NOT HEARD EITHER MAN REFER IN ANY WAY TO THE OTHER, NOR HAVE WE SEEN THE TWO FRATERNIZING AT THE HECTIC ANC HEADQUARTERS OR ELSEWHERE. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT BOTH MEN ARE EXCEPTIONALLY STRONG PERSONALITIES WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION AND AMONG THE TOP FEW "MOVERS AND SHAKERS" IN THE LEADERSHIP.

13. IF MBEKI AND HANI (BOTH 48) STILL HAVE A CLOSE FRIENDSHIP, WE WOULD BE SURPRISED. THOUGH CONTEMPORARIES FROM TRANSKEI, MANY OTHER FACTORS MILITATE AGAINST A SMOOTH RELATIONSHIP, NOT LEAST THEIR DIVERGENT FUNCTIONS WITHIN THE ANC. NOR COULD EITHER OF THEM BE OBLIVIOUS TO THE INTENSE PUBLIC SPECULATION -- WHICH IS ALREADY GEARING UP AGAIN IN ANTICIPATION OF THE JUNE ANC ELECTIONS -- OVER WHICH OF THE TWO WILL ONE DAY MOVE INTO THE PREMIER POSITION. WHILE THE HANI-MBEKI LINK MAY NOT BE WARM, WE SUSPECT BOTH MEN REALIZE THE OVERRIDING NEED TO MANAGE THE RELATIONSHIP, FOR NOW AT LEAST, FOR THE SAKE OF THE ORGANIZATION.

14. MBEKI IS THE CONSUMMATE DIPLOMAT WHO IS BELIEVED TO BE LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR CHOREOGRAPHING THE OVERALL POLICY SHIFT AWAY FROM THE ARMED STRUGGLE TO NEGOTIATIONS IN RECENT YEARS. HE IS RUMORED TO BE AMONG THE FIRST AND MOST PERSUASIVE NEC MEMBERS TO ARGUE IN FAVOR OF SUSPENDING ARMED ACTIONS LAST AUGUST. IN MAKING HIS ARGUMENTS, MBEKI NO DOUBT HAD TO MARSHAL CRITICAL ASSESSMENTS OF THE EFFICACY OF THE ARMED STRUGGLE. HANI WOULD LIKELY HAVE VIEWED SUCH REMARKS AS BORDERING ON CRITICISM OF HIS OWN EFFORTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

15. WHILE HANI NO DOUBT SUPPORTS OFFICIAL ANC POLICY, HE SKIRTS VERY CLOSE TO THE EDGES WHEN IT COMES TO THE ROLE OF UMKHONTO WE Sizwe (MK). MANY OF HIS PUBLIC REMARKS, WHICH THE SAG CONSIDERS INFLAMMATORY AND CONTRARY TO THE SPIRIT OF ANC-SAG AGREEMENTS, COULD ONLY COMPLICATE THABO'S JOB OF MOVING TALKS FORWARD EXPEDITIOUSLY. HANI'S HANDLING OF THE ARMED ACTIONS WORKING GROUP, WHICH HE CHAIRED, LEFT MUCH TO BE DESIRED -- THOUGH, GRANTED, HE HAD A VERY DIFFICULT TASK. HANI FAILED TO SHOW UP FOR SOME JOINT WORKING GROUP MEETINGS, EVEN AFTER HIS DISPUTED INDEMNITY STATUS WAS RESOLVED. HIS ANC COLLEAGUES WERE SOMETIMES AT A LOSS TO EXPLAIN HIS ABSENCE TO US. MBEKI WOULD REGARD SUCH BEHAVIOR AS IRRESPONSIBLE AND DAMAGING TO THE OVERALL NEGOTIATIONS STRATEGY.

16. TWO POLITICAL STYLES COULD HARDLY DIFFER MORE THAN MBEKI'S AND HANI'S. MBEKI TAKES A DISPASSIONATE, REASONED APPROACH TO ISSUES WHICH HE PRESENTS IN UNDERSTATED TERMS. HIS AUTHORITY TO DEAL WITH SAG OFFICIALS, CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY, WHITE SOUTH AFRICAN OPINION LEADERS, FOREIGN ENVOYS, ETC. IS SECOND ONLY TO MANDELA'S. WHEN THE DEPUTY

PRESIDENT TRAVELS ABROAD WITHOUT MBEKI, THE LATTER APPEARS TO BE IN CHARGE OF ISSUES RELATING TO THE NEGOTIATIONS. MANDELA WILL OFTEN PHONE MBEKI FROM OVERSEAS TO CHECK ON DEVELOPMENTS.

17. MBEKI DOES NOT DEVOTE MUCH OF HIS TIME TO STUMPING AMONG THE BLACK POPULATION. HE RARELY FEATURES AT MASS RALLIES AND DOES NOT, INsofar AS WE CAN TELL, ATTEMPT TO CULTIVATE A CONSTITUENCY IN HIS HOME AREA (TRANSKEI) OR ANYWHERE ELSE. SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE MBEKI'S FAILURE TO BUILD GRASSROOTS POLITICAL SUPPORT DAMAGES HIS APPEAL WITH THE MASSES AND COULD HURT HIM IN HIS EVENTUAL BID FOR THE TOP JOB (BUT WE ARE NOT CONVINCED). WE HAVE HEARD LOWER LEVEL ANC OFFICIALS REMARK THAT MBEKI'S ASSOCIATION WITH EFFORTS TO SOFTEN THE ANC SANCTIONS POSITION AT THE DECEMBER CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE HAS HURT HIM WITH THE PARTY RANK AND FILE.

18. HANI IS MORE A MAN OF THE PEOPLE. HE GENERALLY STAYS OUT OF THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS (EXCEPT AS CHAIR OF THE ARMED ACTIONS WORKING GROUP WHERE HE REPORTEDLY DOES A GOOD JOB WHEN HE PARTICIPATES). HE ESCHEWS CONTACTS WITH DIPLOMATS, JOURNALISTS, BUSINESSMEN ETC., YET APPEARS OFTEN ON PUBLIC PLATFORMS IN THE TOWNSHIPS WEARING QUASI-COMBAT FATIGUES AND DELIVERING FIERY SPEECHES THAT AROUSE AND DELIGHT THE AUDIENCE. HANI MAY WELL CULTIVATE THIS RADICAL IMAGE TO SOME EXTENT, AND WITTINGLY ALLOW HIMSELF TO BE USED BY THE ANC AS A FOIL AGAINST THE PAC'S EFFORT TO WIN THE SOUL OF THE TOWNSHIP YOUTH.

19. HANI SPENDS ALOT OF TIME IN TRANSKEI, HIS BIRTHPLACE, WHERE WITH GENERAL HOLOMISA'S PERMISSION HE RESIDES IN THE NOW-VACATED PRIME MINISTER'S RESIDENCE AND OFTEN ADDRESSES CROWDS THERE. HIS REPEATED REFERENCES TO MK AND ITS ROLE IN KEEPING THE SAG HONEST ENDEAR HIM TO THE MORE RADICAL ELEMENTS OF THE MOVEMENT. HANI WAS SELECTED TO DELIVER THE HARD-HITTING GENERAL RESOLUTION AT THE DECEMBER CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE, WHERE THE RANK AND FILE PRIVATELY BLASTED THE LEADERSHIP FOR SUSPENDING THE ARMED STRUGGLE WITHOUT GETTING MUCH IN RETURN FROM THE SAG.

110. HANI'S UNDERGROUND WORK IN THE COUNTRY, HIS ALLEGED PARTICIPATION IN COMBAT ALONGSIDE ZAPU AGAINST SMITH'S RHODESIAN ARMY, AND HIS NARROW ESCAPE FROM MORE THAN ONE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT HAVE TAKEN ON LEGENDARY PROPORTIONS IN THE TOWNSHIPS. AGAIN, MANY OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT HANI WOULD TROUNCE MBEKI IF THERE WERE A POPULAR VOTE AMONG ANC SUPPORTERS. THE MEDIA HERE SOMETIMES SUGGESTS HANI IS UNABASHEDLY PROMOTING HIS OWN ASCENT TO ANC LEADERSHIP, BUT HOLOMISA -- WHO KNOWS HANI WELL -- SCOFFS AT ALLEGATIONS THAT HANI IS POWER-HUNGRY. HOLOMISA BELIEVES HANI'S APPOINTMENT TO THE SACP'S INTERNAL LEADERSHIP GROUP VIRTUALLY RULES HIM OUT OF CONTENTION FOR THE TOP ANC POSITION. THE LEADERSHIP OF THE ANC-SACP ALLIANCE, HOLOMISA REASONS, WILL NEVER GO TO AN OFFICIAL FROM THE SMALLER PARTY (I.E., THE SACP), AND HANI MUST HAVE REALIZED THIS FACT WHEN HE ACCEPTED HIS SACP POSITION LAST YEAR.

111. MBEKI IS SAID TO HAVE A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH ANC PRESIDENT OLIVER TAMBO, WHO MADE THABO HIS POLITICAL SECRETARY IN 1978. WE HAVE NOT, HOWEVER, OBSERVED ANY PARTICULAR WARMTH IN THE MBEKI-MANDELA RELATIONSHIP, BUT CLEARLY MANDELA HAS ENTRUSTED A GREAT DEAL TO THABO. HANI DOES STAY AT THE MANDELA RESIDENCE WHEN HE IS IN THIS AREA, BUT WE BELIEVE THIS PRIMARILY REFLECTS THE FACT THAT HE IS A FAVORITE OF WINNIE'S. HE FREQUENTLY JOINS HER ON THE PLATFORM AT MASS RALLIES WHERE BOTH ARE ASKED TO SPEAK, AND HE OFTEN ACCOMPANIES HER TO TRIAL IN JOHANNESBURG.

112. BOTH HANI AND MBEKI ARE UNIVERSITY EDUCATED WITH AN INTELLECTUAL BENT AND HAVE UNDERGONE MILITARY TRAINING. SAG OFFICIALS HAVE REMARKED PARTICULARLY ON HANI'S ABILITY TO DEBATE THE FINE POINTS OF THE CLASSICS. THE LATEST "WHO'S WHO" BY SHELAGH GASTROW NOTES THAT HANI ROSE TO THE ANC'S NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE IN 1974 (AT THE AGE OF 32), WHILE MBEKI WAS APPOINTED IN 1975.

¶13. IN MANY WAYS, HANI AND MBEKI PERSONIFY AND EPITOMIZE THE TWO FACES OF THE ANC. ALTHOUGH THERE IS WIDESPREAD SPECULATION THAT THE TWO ARE AMBITIOUS RIVALS, WE HAVE NO CONCLUSIVE PROOF THAT THIS IS THE CASE. IF A RIVALRY EXISTS, NEITHER MAN GAINS FROM PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE OF IT. FOR NOW, WE WOULD EXPECT HANI AND MBEKI TO CONCENTRATE ON THEIR RESPECTIVE PORTFOLIOS WHILE KEEPING ANY LEADERSHIP ASPIRATIONS THEY MAY HAVE CAREFULLY UNDER WRAPS.

SWING.